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THE POLITICS OF ARMS CONTROL AND THE STRATEGIC BALANCE
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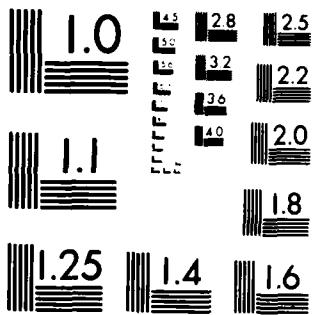
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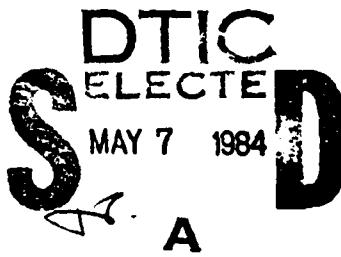
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Alan Platt

December 1982



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Santa Monica, California 90406

THE POLITICS OF ARMS CONTROL AND THE STRATEGIC BALANCE*

Alan Platt **

Since the 1980 presidential campaign, many observers both in the United States and abroad have been closely watching the Reagan Administration's policy toward nuclear weapons. In essence, the administration's approach is two-tiered: (1) to build up significantly America's own nuclear capabilities, and (2) to pursue cautiously arms control as an instrument of national security policy. Concerning the latter, the administration has adhered to the terms of the SALT II treaty, signed in 1979 but never ratified by the U.S. Senate. It has begun negotiations with the Soviets both on limiting intermediate-range nuclear forces (INF) and on reducing intercontinental strategic arms (START).

Whatever the ultimate outcome of these talks, negotiations are likely to be protracted, and it is not too soon for the Reagan White House to begin thinking about managing the politics of these arms control negotiations. Yet all the evidence indicates that, thus far, no high-level or systematic attention has been paid to this matter. To devise an appropriate strategy for managing the domestic politics of its arms control efforts, the Reagan Administration would be well-advised to look at and learn from the Carter Administration's unsuccessful experience in managing SALT II.

There are now two major schools of thought about why the SALT II Treaty was not ratified. One school, reflected in a recent work by Charles Kupperman of the Committee on the Present Danger,¹ holds that the SALT II Treaty--because it is fatally flawed substantively--does not promote U.S. security interests and accordingly was not approved

* This chapter appears in Barry Blechman (ed.), *Rethinking the U.S. Strategic Posture* (Cambridge: Ballinger, 1982).

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by the Senate. A second school of thought holds that the treaty, while not a perfect document, does in fact enhance American security and would have been approved by the Senate had it not been for coincident Soviet behavior challenging American interests in various parts of the world. This is the reasoning, for example, behind Zbigniew Brzezinski's short-hand references to SALT being "buried in the sands of Ogaden."²

Both of these arguments implicitly downplay a very important reason why the SALT II Treaty was not ratified by the Senate--the overall ineptness of the Carter Administration with respect to the political management of difficult legislative issues. The central thesis of this chapter is that the Carter Administration made a series of political misjudgments and mistakes, largely prior to the June 1979 signing of SALT II, which undermined congressional and public confidence in the executive branch's stewardship of strategic issues and which, cumulatively, significantly hurt the treaty's chances for ratification. At a minimum, these misjudgments and mistakes helped shape a political environment in which Soviet behavior in places like the Horn of Africa and Cuba, to say nothing of the December 1979 invasion of Afghanistan, created a bipartisan political consensus such that consideration of the SALT II Treaty had to be deferred.

If strategic arms control is to play an important role in American defense security policy in the future, it is crucial for policymakers and the attentive public to understand the precise reasons why the SALT II Treaty acquired such a poor reputation during the years of the Carter Administration and ultimately was not ratified by the Senate. This chapter is intended to contribute to such understanding, first by examining recent popular American attitudes toward strategic arms control and then by analyzing selected aspects of the Carter Administration's management of the politics of SALT during 1977-79. The discussion of the Carter Administration, while largely critical, is intended to provide useful lessons for future efforts at strategic arms control. The chapter concludes with a discussion of some of the policy implications of these lessons.

AMERICAN PUBLIC OPINION AND STRATEGIC ARMS

Recent trends in American public opinion set the backdrop for the negotiation of SALT II as well as Senate consideration of the treaty. They probably will be important in terms of any future efforts at strategic arms control. When the Carter Administration took office in January 1977, SALT was not an important or familiar issue to the American people. A 1977 Roper Organization poll showed that approximately 33 percent of those interviewed had never heard of SALT. In January 1979 a CBS/New York Times poll indicated that a substantial majority of the American people did not know which countries were involved in the strategic arms talks.³ A poll commissioned by the Committee on the Present Danger, taken in March 1979, reinforced earlier polling results, showing that a large majority of Americans did not have any substantive knowledge of the provisions of the SALT II Treaty.⁴

While ignorant about SALT per se, American public opinion was and continues to be supportive of strategic arms control in the abstract. In March 1977 a Harris poll found that 77 percent of Americans would "favor the United States and Russia coming to a new SALT arms control agreement that would limit the number of nuclear warheads and missiles they can deploy." Subsequent Harris polls in 1977, 1978, and 1979 all found support for a SALT agreement, in the abstract, among 67 to 80 percent of the respondents, and in a late 1980 poll, 83 percent of the respondents agreed that it was "vital for the United States and the Soviet Union to reach an agreement to limit nuclear arms." It should be added that the concept of strategic arms control has been supported consistently by all the various strata in American society. Not surprisingly though, the young, the best educated, and the best informed segments of the populace have tended to be the most supportive. Furthermore, urban, female, and East Coast respondents have consistently registered higher levels of support than other respondents.⁵

These same polls over the last several years have shown that discussions between the United States and the Soviet Union to try to control nuclear weapons are widely viewed as likely to lead to a reduction in tensions between the two countries. In addition, many Americans believe that the talks and resulting arms control agreements are likely

to reduce the risk of nuclear war. As such, the idea of strategic arms limitation talks has been strongly and consistently supported by the American people and the current interest in a nuclear freeze is the latest manifestation of this support.

At the same time, popular support for the SALT II Treaty itself declined in the 1979-80 years. According to the Gallup organization, the ratio favoring ratification of SALT II in March 1979 was three to one (of those in the sample who were considered "informed," 27 percent favored approval, 9 percent were opposed, and 9 percent had no opinion). By June 1979--the date the treaty was concluded, signed, and sent to the Senate for ratification--this ratio had declined somewhat to five to three. In September 1979 and March 1980, Gallup surveys showed those supporting and those opposing the treaty were in about equal proportions. The March 1980 poll, for example, indicated that 26 percent of the "informed" public favored Senate approval, 26 percent opposed, and 9 percent had no opinion.⁶

NBC News/Associated Press polls showed an even steeper decline in public support for SALT II in the course of 1979. In April 1979, when asked whether they favored or opposed "this new SALT agreement," responses indicated 72 percent in favor, 19 percent opposed, and 8 percent not sure. By July only 50 percent favored the treaty, 40 percent opposed, and 10 percent were not sure. By September 1979, 43 percent were in favor, 50 percent were opposed, and 7 percent were not sure.⁷ In a Harris poll taken soon after the 1980 presidential election, 64 percent of the respondents said that they agreed with President-elect Reagan that "the SALT II treaty should be scrapped and negotiations should be started again for a new nuclear arms agreement with the Russians." In this poll, 28 percent of the respondents disagreed with the new president's position, while 8 percent were not sure.⁸ Of course, there is some question whether this November 1980 poll indicated dissatisfaction with the SALT II Treaty per se or if it represented popular sentiment rallying around a newly elected president, particularly as that president may have been perceived to have a better chance to get a SALT treaty ratified by the Senate if negotiations were begun anew. Nevertheless, the precipitous decline in

popular support for the SALT II Treaty between 1977 and 1980 is indisputable.

Why has public opinion consistently supported strategic arms control in the abstract while forsaking the SALT II Treaty itself? A partial explanation of this seeming paradox lies in the public's perceptions about the negative effects of a SALT II agreement on the U.S.-Soviet strategic balance. To many, SALT II, setting equal limits and sublimits on different categories of strategic nuclear delivery vehicles, was seen as ratifying a state of nuclear equality between the two superpowers. To others, however, the treaty was seen as dangerously weakening U.S. forces by setting certain limits on such important new weapon systems as cruise missiles, while accelerating an ongoing trend toward Soviet superiority over America by failing to restrict sufficiently the Soviet's Backfire bombers and heavy missiles. To still others, the SALT II Treaty was perceived as a deterrent to the resurrection of a dynamic American strategic weapons program. Among these observers, there was a fear that ratification of SALT II would lull America into a false sense of nuclear security and prevent the development of a consensus in the Congress that would allow the United States to compete effectively with the Soviets in the military sphere. These observers often pointed out that the Soviets have made impressive military advances since the 1972 SALT I accords went into effect.

Coincident with these negative perceptions of the SALT II Treaty itself has been a discernible trend in recent years in the United States in favor of the adoption of a stronger military stance vis-à-vis the Soviet Union. Today, a majority of Americans believe that it is necessary for the United States to be militarily superior to the Soviet Union, rather than equal in strength. This has not always been true in recent years. In July 1978, for example, a plurality of respondents queried by the ABC News/Harris survey felt that it was a necessity for the United States to be as strong as the Soviets but not stronger. This viewpoint changed in the course of 1978-79, and by October 1979 a follow-up survey found that 49 percent of the respondents felt that it was necessary for the United States to be militarily stronger than the Soviets, while 43 percent felt that being equally strong was the

preferable foreign policy objective.⁹ By January 1981, 52 percent of the respondents in a CBS News/New York Times poll felt that the United States should be superior militarily to the Soviets, with only 39 percent of the respondents believing that we should be equal in strength.¹⁰ Not surprisingly, the SALT II treaty, representing at best strategic equality and to some strategic inferiority, was perceived by a growing percentage of Americans as being at odds with this necessary military posture.

Similarly, attitudes toward increased American defense spending changed rapidly. In a 1981 poll, the Gallup organization found the highest level of public support for increased defense spending in more than a decade. Asked about the adequacy of spending for national defense, 51 percent of the respondents felt that the amount of the budget for defense was "too little," 23 percent felt it was "about right," and 15 percent thought that "too much" was being spent on defense. This marked the first time that the Gallup organization had ever found that a majority of Americans believe that the defense budget was "inadequate." By way of comparison, when this question was asked in 1978, 32 percent thought that the United States was spending "too little," 45 percent thought the amount "about right," and 16 percent "too much." When the question was asked in 1969, when opposition to the Vietnam war and American entanglements abroad was growing, only 8 percent of the public supported increases in defense spending for military purposes and 31 percent thought we were spending about the right amount for defense.¹¹

These changing general attitudes on SALT and defense spending are in part attributable to the decline of the impact of American involvement in Indochina and, in the words of Louis Kriesberg and Ross Klein, the fading of "the Vietnam trauma" that produced "antimilitarism" in America and a "hands-off" approach to international relations.¹² In part, they are traceable to the growth of popular anti-Soviet feeling in the 1970s, a sentiment that has been strongly reinforced by continuing increases in Soviet defense spending, a growing perception that the USSR has moved ahead of the United States in armed strength, and frequent examples of assertive Soviet behavior in the international

arena. Finally, these popular attitudes have been fueled by the broad-ranging efforts of influential individuals and interest groups alarmed by what they perceive as a declining American strategic position in the world. United in their perceptions and concern about ascendant Soviet power and American retreat, these individuals (e.g., Senator Henry Jackson, Daniel Graham) and special-interest groups (e.g., Committee on the Present Danger, Coalition for Peace Through Strength) seem to have been effective in the past few years in influencing both elite and popular attitudes with respect to the trends in the American-Soviet strategic balance and how the ratification of the SALT II Treaty would accelerate those trends. In an article on why and how the SALT II Treaty should be defeated, syndicated columnist Patrick Buchanan summarized this line of argument against SALT in the following way:

The country must be instructed in the new math of the 1980s. The United States has surrendered strategic superiority; we are in the process of losing parity; we are entering an era in which the West will be militarily inferior to the East--ripe for Soviet blackmail, Soviet bullying and, conceivably, Soviet attack.¹³

If the United States in the late 1970s had continued to enjoy the position of superiority it unquestionably enjoyed during much of the postwar period, these arguments may have fallen largely on deaf ears. However, given general American disenchantment with detente, the loss of American influence in the third world, and declining public confidence in America's institutions and leaders, these arguments carried a good deal of weight and appeared to play an important role in shaping the backdrop for, and also the terms of the debate on SALT II.

THE CARTER ADMINISTRATION AND SALT II

Notwithstanding these trends in American public opinion, popular support for strategic arms control in the abstract might have been translated into Congressional support for SALT II had the Carter Administration been more adroit at legislative political management.

However, in the main, this was not the case--certainly not in comparison with the Kennedy Administration's handling of the 1963 Limited Test Ban Treaty or the Johnson Administration's management of the 1968 Non-Proliferation Treaty or the Nixon Administration's handling of the ratification of SALT I in 1972. Indeed, with effective political management, the Carter Administration might have succeeded in getting SALT II ratified in essentially its present form, since the major problems associated with its ratification were due less to substantive weaknesses in the treaty, as was apparent during the summer 1979 Senate Foreign Relations Committee hearings, than to a series of political and tactical mistakes that helped doom the administration's SALT ratification efforts.

The Carter Administration's political mistakes regarding SALT strategy and tactics were most serious with respect to: (1) communicating the treaty's importance; (2) establishing public confidence in the negotiating effort; (3) internal organization; (4) lobbying individual Senators; (5) timing. In each of these areas, there are important lessons to be learned from the Carter Administration's experiences that undoubtedly will have relevance for any future strategic arms control efforts.

SALT II, as concluded in 1979 and sent to the Senate for ratification, is clearly not an ideal document. As the congressional hearings on the treaty demonstrated, several provisions in SALT II theoretically could have been significantly improved, particularly those concerning the relatively high ceilings and subceilings on different types of strategic weapons. Nevertheless, the treaty does place equal aggregates on both sides' strategic nuclear delivery vehicles and in so doing enhances the effectiveness of American deterrent against nuclear attack and its retaliatory power if war did break out. It excludes from the aggregate limits American forward-based missiles and nuclear-capable aircraft that could reach the Soviet Union from their bases in Europe. It constrains significantly the quantity and quality of planned Soviet ICBMs, the most threatening part of the Soviet arsenal. And it significantly improves both sides' ability to assess the other's strategic forces and thus to verify compliance with the treaty.

The Carter Administration was faced with a choice of at least two alternative ways to communicate, in terms of tone and content, these values of emerging SALT II Treaty to the Congress and the American people. On the one hand, it could have adopted the approach that the Nixon Administration purposefully followed regarding SALT I, constantly underscoring the absolutely vital, global importance of the new SALT agreement. This approach would have highlighted SALT II as an extremely important document in its own right in capping and stabilizing the nuclear arms competition between the superpowers and in winding down, although clearly not ending, the arms race. This approach also would have stressed the critical importance of the ratification of SALT II for the preservation of NATO, to say nothing of its role in preventing a nuclear holocaust. On the other hand, the Carter Administration could have adopted an approach that posited that SALT II was certainly no worse than SALT I and that, marginally, the United States would be better off with the treaty than without it. This approach would have emphasized that SALT II was only one stage in the process of American-Soviet discussions on the control of nuclear weapons and the maintenance of rough strategic equivalence and that after SALT II was ratified, negotiations would commence immediately on SALT III, which would be much more meaningful in terms of reducing the strategic arsenals of the two superpowers. The dilemma of which approach to use in publicly communicating SALT II's importance clearly confounded the Carter Administration, as it did the Ford Administration, and will undoubtedly be a tactical issue to be resolved regarding any future strategic arms control agreement.

In reality, the Carter Administration followed both approaches at different times, although the second--the marginalist approach--seemed to be dominant, particularly in the period before the actual signing of SALT II in June 1979.¹⁴ To some extent, the use of the marginalist approach was unavoidable: It is hard to assert with any credibility the critical importance of a treaty that is not yet concluded. The marginalist approach was consciously adopted, though, by the Carter Administration, a result of a series of interagency meetings in late 1977 and early 1978. This approach was chosen on the pragmatic

grounds that it was likely to be the more successful tack in gaining congressional and public acceptance of SALT II.

In fact, this was an important political miscalculation. By stressing the marginality of SALT II and its importance as a stepping-stone to truly meaningful arms control efforts, statements by administration representatives frequently had the effect of focusing attention on specific shortcomings in the treaty rather than on the accord's overall worth. This, of course, enhanced the influence of anti-SALT senators, columnists, and interest groups, whose own view about the treaty's shortcomings were thus accorded valuable credibility and reinforcement. The marginalist approach, ironically, also had the effect of undermining support for the agreement among a number of senators, who otherwise might have been expected to back it (e.g., Hatfield, McGovern, Moynihan, Proxmire, and Stevenson), as well as similarly minded interest groups who came to question the utility of the treaty on arms control grounds. Most importantly, the marginalist approach failed to take into account and capitalize on the public's general support for strategic arms control as a way to stabilize American-Soviet arms competition and to lessen significantly the risk of nuclear war. If one accepts former chief SALT negotiator Paul Warnke's view that arms control is an unnatural act, it is clear that it is politically useful to emphasize, and at times purposefully overstate, the significance of any given strategic arms control agreement to the avoidance of nuclear war. This point was largely lost on the Carter Administration until perhaps late 1979, by which time the SALT II Treaty had acquired a marginal or negative image in the minds of many members of Congress as well as among much of the public-at-large. On the other hand, had the administration followed the Nixon Administration's example and adopted a more positive and expansive public approach on SALT from the outset, the executive would have been in a far better position later on to move decisively to crystallize this public disposition, mobilize it, and transform it into a potent political force.

The effectiveness of the administration's communications about SALT II's importance also was badly hurt, perhaps more significantly by the executive's inability to generate public confidence in its

treaty negotiating effort. Throughout 1977-78, both administration and independently sponsored polls showed that the single most important factor influencing popular attitudes on SALT was the relatively low confidence the American people had that the treaty's negotiators would protect American security interests. This was the case even when this factor was compared to such other factors as the relative military strength of the United States and the Soviet Union.¹⁵

Public confidence in the Carter Administration's SALT II negotiating effort got off to a bad start in early 1977 as a result of the confirmation hearings of Paul Warnke to be chief SALT negotiator and the director of the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency. To many, Warnke was an ideal choice for these two positions given his extensive background in arms control and defense matters and his high-level experience at the Pentagon during the 1960s. Warnke was opposed for these posts, however, by a number of detractors in the Senate and elsewhere who felt, among other things, that he was not likely to be "tough enough" with the Soviets in negotiating a new SALT agreement.

The Warnke confirmation process provided the new administration with an early opportunity to take its case about SALT's vital importance and its competent stewardship of this major foreign policy issue to the Congress and the American people. This opportunity was not effectively seized. Indeed, instead of building public confidence in the new administration's approach to SALT, the confirmation hearings and the vote seriously--perhaps fatally--undermined the public's sense that the Carter Administration could negotiate a new SALT agreement that would protect American security interests.

Facing well-organized and well-financed opposition to the Warnke nomination among interest groups and the media, the administration should have launched a major political campaign prior to the nomination's public announcement, with the idea of winning a resounding vote of confidence in both Paul Warnke and the administration's planned SALT efforts. Instead, it reacted defensively and somewhat naively, privately hoping that the opposition would in time wither away. On the other hand, the opposition forces well understood that a negative or even a close vote on the nomination was of great potential importance,

for such a vote would have the effect of seriously undermining public confidence in the new administration's leadership on SALT-related issues.

In any event--first in the Senate Foreign Relations Committee and then in the Committee on Armed Service, whose membership included several outspoken SALT opponents (e.g., Jackson, Tower, Thurmond, Scott, Goldwater, Garn)--the Warnke confirmation hearings were widely followed. The Armed Services Committee hearings were particularly closely covered by the national news media and proved to be a highly visible sounding board for arguments against SALT and Warnke's leadership of the negotiating effort. In the end, the Senate confirmed Warnke for both posts, but the vote on the SALT negotiation nomination was fifty-eight to forty. The forty votes against Warnke for the SALT position represented six votes more than were needed to defeat a new SALT treaty. Anti-SALT forces, in effect, has successfully sent a message to the President and the Congress that there was a substantial segment of opinion in the Senate that lacked confidence in the new administration's proposed approach to SALT II.

The negative impact of the Warnke confirmation fight might have been significantly mitigated had the Carter White House understood the central importance of having the administration's top national security team play an active, publicly visible role in explaining the general terms of SALT II prior to its final conclusion. On an issue as important and complex as SALT, most members of Congress as well as the majority of the American people look to the president, their commander-in-chief, and the military for leadership. Early in the Carter Administration, however, the president and his principal military advisors--Secretary of Defense Harold Brown and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff David Jones--dissipated significant congressional and public confidence in their toughness and reliability on national security issues as a result of the decisions not to go ahead with the B-1 bomber, to close down the Minuteman III production line, to withdraw American troops from Korea, and not to proceed with the deployment of the neutron bomb. Whether or not these decisions were well-founded on their merits is debatable--their political effect, however,

was clear. Public leadership by the president and the military on SALT II prior to the treaty's submission to the Senate for ratification was even more critical than it might otherwise have been because of these other defense decisions as well as the fight over the Warnke nomination, periodically lukewarm public confidence in President Carter, and a continuing stream of anti-SALT press leaks. Morton Kondracke summed up this situation very well when in 1978 he noted:

If there is any area in which trust in the President is crucial, it is SALT. The issues are so complex, so higher-mathematical, so apocalyptic that most citizens and even many Senators ultimately will decide what they favor on the basis of whose arguments seem to have credibility. . . . Carter is entering the battle with a severe confidence problem. . . .¹⁶

Nevertheless, it was Carter Administration policy that while the SALT II Treaty was still being negotiated, the executive branch would severely restrict the quantity and quality of information publicly disseminated on SALT II. There was great fear that if there was too much public discussion on the treaty's contents, particularly concerning verification and Soviet concessions, the successful conclusion of the treaty would be jeopardized. To the extent that any case was to be made publicly in behalf of SALT II prior to the treaty's signing, it was to be made by the State Department, the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency, and middle-level civilians at the Pentagon. Defense Department personnel at the assistant secretary level or above, for example, were not authorized to speak publicly on behalf of the treaty prior to its submission to the Senate for ratification. In the words of one senior administration official, "The President, Harold Brown and the Chiefs were to be the big guns after the treaty was signed and the ratification fight really began."

The absence of sustained presidential and military leadership on SALT II during the first two-and-one-half years of the Carter Administration would not have been so consequential had the Secretary of State been of a different temperament. Cyrus Vance, an inherently low-key lawyer, was not given to frequent public educational efforts on

SALT or most other issues, and he consistently rejected public-speaking opportunities and media interviews that would have afforded the administration the opportunity to make the best case for the emerging SALT II Treaty. As Zbigniew Brzezinski subsequently acknowledged in an interview, "Secretary of State Vance had various strong qualities, but an inclination to engage in what might be called a sustained effort to educate the American public was not among them."¹⁷ This aspect of Vance's personal makeup significantly hurt the administration's SALT public education effort.

Furthermore, largely preoccupied with other issues during the first several months of the new administration, Secretary Vance did not initially master the detailed intricacies of SALT. This was unfortunate because when asked to testify about the details of the U.S. SALT II negotiating posture in the fall of 1977, he was not able to answer many of the detailed questions put to him by the members of the Senate Armed Services Subcommittee on Arms Control, chaired by Henry Jackson. At one closed-door hearing in mid-October 1977, Senator Sam Nunn, a key swing vote on SALT, was so taken aback by Vance's seeming lack of familiarity with the details of the U.S. negotiating position that he asked rhetorically—"Who in fact is in charge of overseeing the negotiations?" In short order, Vance learned the SALT brief and soon became an eloquent defender of every nuance in the Joint Draft Text of the SALT II accord, but his initial performances before the Jackson subcommittee, combined with his personal reticence to give public speeches, did little to bolster confidence in the U.S. negotiating effort.

Of course, the lion's share of responsibility for the administration's misjudgments with respect to the political management of the SALT II Treaty must rest ultimately with the president. However, part of the explanation for a number of tactical mistakes can be traced to the way that the Carter Administration was organized and staffed for SALT matters. Until June 1979 when the SALT II Treaty actually was signed and White House Counsel Lloyd Cutler was put in charge of ratification efforts, most matters related to SALT were handled by technical experts, not politically experienced professionals.

To deal with daily matters regarding SALT, including communications with the delegation in Geneva, an interagency group called the Special Coordinating Committee (SCC) met regularly at the White House.¹⁸ The members of this group, all substantive experts on the technical complexities of weapon systems, typically had limited political experience. Yet, the mini-SCC and its subgroups, not the White House or any interagency political group, was responsible for the management of political--as well as technical--SALT issues on an ongoing basis. In the period prior to the actual signing of the treaty, this group did not welcome nor were they inundated with political advice from the president's key political advisors--Hamilton Jordan, Jody Powell, Patrick Caddell, and Charles Kirbo. Moreover, several of the members of the mini-SCC had previously worked on SALT I during the early 1970s and had largely been excluded from dealing with any of the political issues associated with strategic arms limitation, that being the pre-eminent domain of Henry Kissinger. Not surprisingly, these people now relished and closely guarded their new responsibilities.

Probably the mini-SCC's greatest mistake in the management of SALT politics was its failure to understand the critical importance of generating and maintaining public confidence in the SALT negotiating effort prior to the treaty's submission to the Senate. Had this been widely understood, the group would have taken steps to modify the previously noted marginalist approach. It might also have discretely disclosed the more significant Soviet concessions at various points in the course of negotiations. As it was, the members of the mini-SCC worried principally about two matters--the possible over-selling of the terms of the treaty and the premature disclosure of any sensitive information about the actual details of the negotiations, most particularly concerning Soviet concessions. These were views one might expect from technical experts familiar with the relatively modest accomplishments of the treaty. But they were hardly shrewd political judgments, particularly in the face of the multi-million-dollar campaign being waged against the treaty during 1977-79.

The absence of a White House-directed SALT political coordinating group perceptibly hurt the administration's lobbying in the period

prior to June 1979. This was particularly true concerning the arrangement of briefings about the emerging treaty. A few examples illustrate some of the political wounds the administration inflicted on itself. In one instance, when a group of several influential senators visited Geneva in the spring of 1978 to be briefed on SALT II, both chief negotiator Warnke and his deputy Ralph Earle were not in Switzerland. A State Department representative was chosen to lead the Geneva briefings. Unfortunately, the briefer, while technically knowledgeable, was unable to respond effectively to inquiries about the policy implications of several of the treaty's provisions. After their return to Washington, a few of these senators met privately with Secretary Vance to complain about the Geneva SALT briefing, confiding that they were now considerably more concerned about U.S. efforts at SALT than they were prior to the trip. Soon thereafter, the State Department official was recalled and reassigned but not before perceptible damage had been done to the confidence of several important senators in the U.S. negotiating effort. In another instance, when an important, undecided southern senator requested a briefing on SALT, two technical experts made the presentation. Their remarks focused largely on a number of the more arcane provisions of the treaty. After the briefers left the office, the senator, unimpressed and unconvinced, commented graphically to his staff aide, "No wonder SALT is in trouble; those guys couldn't sell a prostitute on an Army train." In a third instance, more than a few people in the executive branch and the Senate were appalled to learn that a very junior Foreign Service officer, who had been working on SALT for a matter of months, had been sent to New York City in the spring of 1978 to brief former vice-president Nelson Rockefeller, among other notables, on the emerging SALT treaty. These and other arrangements regarding SALT briefings could have been handled more skillfully, and to a significant extent they were after the treaty was concluded and a White House group, under Lloyd Cutler, was established.

Moreover, the lobbying of individual senators on SALT might also have been managed more adroitly in the pre-June 1979 period. The treatment of three key senators, all of whom ultimately opposed SALT

II--Howard Baker, Henry Jackson, and John Glenn--illustrates the kinds of tactical errors the administration made in its lobbying efforts.

Howard Baker, Senate Minority Leader and a member of the Foreign Relations Committee, clearly should have been viewed from the outset of the Carter Administration as a crucial vote on SALT, both for his own vote and his potential influence on eight to ten moderate Republicans. Baker's backing was essential if bipartisan support for the treaty was to be built. Somewhat surprisingly, Baker was not treated as carefully as one might have supposed, and the administration ultimately paid dearly for its inattention. The Carter Administration consulted Baker sporadically¹⁹ but failed to meet or allay his privately expressed substantive reservations about the treaty. It also declined to accept his spring 1979 offer to play the role of "honest broker" between the White House and moderate senators who were skeptical of SALT II as it was emerging but might have supported an "improved" treaty. Worse still, President Carter personally intervened in Baker's 1978 reelection campaign on behalf of his Democratic opponent, a candidate who tried to build her campaign on the charge that Baker had voted with the administration to give away the Panama Canal. It is conceivable, given Howard Baker's substantive reservations about SALT II and his 1980 presidential ambitions, that after a 1978 vote to support the Panama Canal Treaties he would not have voted for the SALT II Treaty under any circumstances. Nonetheless, the administration's treatment of the Tennessee senator never put this hypothesis to a fair test and lost whatever support he might have been willing to give to the treaty privately.

While the Carter Administration treated Howard Baker relatively shabbily regarding SALT, it paid too much attention to Henry Jackson. Jackson, chairman of the Senate Armed Service Subcommittee on Arms Control, was the leading Senate critic of SALT II during the Nixon and Ford Administrations. Yet, for the Carter Administration, in the words of Thomas Franck and Edward Weisband, "(Jackson) was early targeted for very special care and feeding by the disarmament negotiators."²⁰ The special attention that was paid to the Washington senator was manifested in numerous ways, including: (1) a willingness

on the part of the administration to study seriously and ultimately incorporate a number of Jackson's SALT recommendations into the comprehensive U.S. proposal presented to the Soviets in March 1977; (2) an unprecedented commitment by Secretary Vance in October 1977 to meet with Jackson's Armed Services Subcommittee on Arms Control every two weeks; and (3) President Carter's agreement to reappoint General Edward Rowny, Jackson's choice, to be the representative of the Joint Chiefs of Staff on the SALT delegation. All three of these measures, and several other initiatives, were undertaken in significant part in the hope of gaining Jackson's support for SALT II. However, none of these steps proved particularly helpful to the SALT ratification effort. Some were perceptibly damaging, such as the presentation of the March 1977 comprehensive proposals wherein the administration set benchmarks to which all subsequent proposals were unfavorably compared. An alternative lobbying approach would have been to leave the door open to Henry Jackson but to focus special attention on several other more open-minded Senators.

One such Senator was John Glenn, the former astronaut and a senior member of the Foreign Relations Committee. From early 1977 onward, Glenn was outspoken in his belief that verification was the key issue regarding the SALT II Treaty. In line with his concerns about the government's ability to verify Soviet compliance with the emerging treaty, Glenn requested in November 1977 that the executive branch prepare for him "a simple matrix" that would reflect the verifiability of the different weapon systems that would be covered by SALT II. This information was not provided to the senator until June 1978, roughly eight months after the request was made initially and only then as a result of Glenn's persistent personal prodding. Even when the information was forwarded to the Ohio senator, there were continuing differences within the executive branch about some of the numbers and attendant conclusions contained in the matrix. Accordingly, it was submitted to Glenn by a middle-level State Department official and was represented as the product of a low-level group of technical experts rather than as a document that had the concurrence of the President, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and the Director

of Central Intelligence. This procedure afforded those technical experts in the executive branch who disagreed with some of the material contained in the matrix the opportunity to disown the document at a later date.

However, the time delay and unofficial submission procedure also had the effect of contributing to already existing doubts in the minds of John Glenn and several of his colleagues about the verifiability of the emerging SALT II Treaty. Particularly in view of the fact that verification is to some extent a matter of confidence in the executive branch's judgment, the administration's dealings with Glenn concerning the matrix and other matters regarding SALT verification should have been handled more authoritatively and expeditiously through the president. Many senators ultimately found persuasive the generally affirmative findings of the Senate Intelligence Committee, which had primary responsibility for judging SALT II's verifiability. Other senators, including Glenn, eventually opposed the treaty, in part because of their concern about the executive branch's ability to monitor the treaty's provisions adequately.²¹

The dilatory handling of John Glenn's request for a "simple matrix" regarding SALT verification vividly underscores another important tactical political mistake the Carter Administration made: It never truly sensed the urgency of moving quickly to conclude SALT II and have it ratified. To be sure, some administration officials sensed that given the mistrust between the two superpowers SALT might be vulnerable to the vicissitudes of overall U.S.-Soviet relations and that the longer the SALT negotiations went on, the greater the chance that Soviet behavior might jeopardize the successful conclusion and ratification of a new SALT treaty. At times, various officials expressed hope for a speedy conclusion of the negotiations, as in October 1977 when President Carter declared publicly that SALT II might be signed "in a few weeks." As an operational matter, however, there was no pervasive sense of urgency among most of the senior officials working directly on SALT, and, in truth, several initiatives were adopted in 1977-78 that significantly prolonged and complicated the SALT negotiations. Most important among these initiatives was the presentation

of a comprehensive SALT proposal to the Soviets in March 1977. In addition, the Carter Administration's human rights policy, particularly as it concerned Soviet dissidents, the conclusions and ratification of the Panama Canal treaties, and the normalization of relations with the People's Republic of China all made the conclusion of SALT II significantly more complicated. These measures and others, in combination with a Soviet tendency to negotiate with glacial speed, perceptibly contributed to delaying the actual conclusion of a SALT II treaty until two-and-one-half years into the Carter Administration. This was despite the fact that the treaty that was eventually signed in Vienna was based largely on the 1974 Vladivostok Accord.

This delay in timing was not without consequence. It permitted subsequent Soviet assertiveness in the Horn of Africa and Afghanistan, *inter alia*, to make positive Senate action on SALT II significantly more difficult. In a January 1981 interview, Zbigniew Brzezinski speculated that "the Senate would 'probably' have approved the strategic arms limitation treaty if it had been negotiated 8 to 12 months earlier."²² Another student of U.S.-Soviet relations, Strobe Talbott, has written about the impact of timing on SALT ratification in the following unequivocal way:

. . . the single biggest problem with SALT was delay. The negotiations had dragged on for too long. The saga of SALT II had become a shaggy dog story of anticlimaxes and missed deadlines. . . . American domestic support for a new treaty lost much of its momentum, while opposition gained steadily, in a political climate of growing anger, fear and frustration directed at the Soviet Union.²³

In short, while one cannot be certain, it does seem likely that Senate consideration of SALT II would have been less complicated had the negotiations been concluded, as they almost were, during the Fall of 1977.

LESSONS FOR THE FUTURE

To be sure, a number of mistakes in the management of the politics of SALT II are more apparent in hindsight. Nevertheless, these failings do suggest some guidelines for future efforts to gain support from both the right and the left for new strategic arms control initiatives.

First, persuading the Senate to ratify a new SALT agreement is likely to require the direct, continuous, and active participation of the president. The Congress and the American people clearly look to the president as commander-in-chief for leadership on a critical national security issue like strategic arms control, particularly given the complexity of the subject and the public's general lack of knowledge about it. Nothing can fully substitute for the president's direct involvement and the use of the presidency as a bully pulpit to educate the public. Extreme presidential secrecy and noninvolvement--however attractive for reasons of negotiations, personal operating style, or foreign relations--are likely to prove self-defeating. Among other things, the president can and should seize early opportunities to shape the terms of the public debate. In so doing, he should attempt to cast the emerging accord--in the face of inevitable damaging press leaks and public criticism--in as reassuring a public light as honesty and prudence will permit.

In this regard, it is critical that the president be concerned with projecting an image of himself and his negotiating team as tough but responsible stewards of America's national security. This could mean persuading the military to support publicly the ongoing negotiating effort. Particularly given recent trends in public opinion regarding the Soviet Union, it may also mean that the tougher a president is perceived to be with the Russians, the easier it will be to get a future SALT treaty ratified. As Milton Viorst has noted, the credibility of future SALT treaties may depend on the president's ability to convey to the public that he is "an unyielding defender of the national interest and can confront the Russians when he must."²⁴

Second, the task of persuading the Congress to approve a new strategic arms control agreement, if it is to be successful, must be viewed early on by the president and his administration as a major political

campaign. The negotiations themselves, of course, should be pursued with all deliberate speed and professionalism, but it is not sufficient to begin the effort to sell the emerging treaty to the Congress and the American people only after the accord is formally submitted to the legislative branch for approval. The campaign must be planned and appropriately implemented long before a treaty is formally concluded. Contrary to the urgings of a number of pro-SALT senators, the Carter Administration acted as if such a campaign could usefully be carried out only after all the details of the treaty were firm. This, in fact, missed an essential point. The best reasons for supporting SALT II or any future arms control agreement are likely to lay not in the accord's detailed provisions but in its implications for stability and predictability, as well as in its beneficial effect in reducing the danger of nuclear war. By not moving with an appropriate sense of urgency, treaty proponents allowed the treaty's opponents, inside and outside the government, to set the terms of the debate. By the time the treaty was submitted to the Senate, the litmus test regarding SALT II's worth hinged for many on the detailed provisions of the treaty. From an administration point of view, a strategic arms agreement should be weighed in terms of the treaty's potential contribution of U.S. security, global stability, and the moderation of U.S.-Soviet arms competition.

Third, future strategic arms control agreements must be perceived as reducing the level of armaments on both sides if they are to be successful politically and must be portrayed as such, positively and expansively, within the United States. This means that future negotiations must in fact be directed, as START is supposed to be, at reducing the strategic arsenals on both sides, not at merely capping them at relatively high levels. Such an approach will make more likely active support from traditional congressional backers of arms control. It will also help spur interest in and private financial contributions to groups supporting arms control and help translate popular support for strategic arms control in the abstract into public support for a concrete agreement. In essence, future strategic arms control agreements, if they are to command broad political support,

must be widely perceived as beneficial rather than marginal or harmless.

Fourth, persuading the Congress to approve a future strategic arms control agreement will require the administration to have its most trusted political professionals continuously and intimately involved in managing the politics of strategic arms control. The Carter Administration's mistakes in 1977 and 1978 with respect to SALT briefings and lobbying vividly demonstrate some of the problems that can result from having SALT technical experts responsible on a day-to-day basis for overseeing important political decisions. Persuasion and coalition-building with respect to ultimately gaining Congressional approval of strategic arms control agreements are tasks for politically experienced personnel who understand SALT, rather than for SALT technicians willing to learn about political matters.

Fifth, it is necessary to have one senior official coordinate the political effort. This individual would have a close personal relationship to the president and no other responsibilities and would be given the authority and legitimacy to speak for the chief executive both within the administration and on Capitol Hill. Only such a person--a czar for strategic arms control--would be able to iron out inevitable interagency differences, coordinate effectively with supportive interest groups, and manage congressional lobbying and public education campaigns smoothly. The operations of Lloyd Cutler regarding SALT ratification after the treaty was submitted to the Senate and the activities of Robert Strauss with respect to the negotiation and ratification of the 1979 Trade Agreements Act both provide models that should be closely studied.

Sixth, in order to gain congressional approval of a future strategic arms agreement, it will be necessary for an administration to be clear about the relationship between strategic arms control and the overall context of U.S.-Soviet relations. The Carter administration oscillated regarding the notion of linkage, sometimes saying that SALT was too important in its own right to be tied to other aspects of U.S.-Soviet relations and at other times blaming assertive Soviet behavior in different parts of the world for delays in the SALT

negotiations. Ultimately, of course, the December 1979 Soviet invasion of Afghanistan dealt a mortal blow to SALT's chances in the Senate, but this was only after some senior officials had explicitly linked SALT to Soviet activities in the Horn of Africa.²⁵ In so doing, as J. Brian Atwood, former Assistant Secretary of State of Congressional Relations, ruefully observed, "the administration had inadvertently legitimized the opponents' most telling argument and had itself undermined the chances for [SALT] ratification."²⁶

Future administrations would be well-advised to be unambiguous about linkage. Either they should make it very clear from the outset that strategic arms control negotiations will be affected by certain aspects of overall U.S.-Soviet relations and be specific about what those aspects, expectations, and linkages will be, or they should argue and proceed as if equitable, verifiable strategic arms control agreements are useful in their own right and should not be tied to other elements in the U.S.-Soviet relationship. It is impossible to say with any certainty which of these two approaches should be chosen in the future. The choice should turn on a number of considerations, including contemporary U.S.-Soviet relations, the political climate in the United States, and the military and political importance of the arms control accord being negotiated. In any case, executive branch invocation of contrary notions of linkage is likely to be confusing, counterproductive, and suggestive of the absence of a coherent, overall policy for linkage to serve.

Seventh, and finally, an administration interested in having a new strategic arms control agreement ratified by the Senate will have to plan and implement an effective strategy to deal with the legislative branch. The recent experiences of the Carter Administration should be looked at with particular care because despite the aforementioned missteps a number of inspired initiatives were undertaken that may be worthy of emulation in the future. For instance, the Carter Administration began the practice of having a selected number of senators and representatives visit Geneva periodically to make a firsthand assessment of the ongoing negotiations and to offer advice to the negotiating team. By most measures, this practice was quite

useful. Among other things, it led the administration to respond constructively to important substantive concerns of several key senators.²⁷

The Carter Administration also encouraged the establishment and active operation of the Cranston Group, a bipartisan group of twenty-three senators who were not generally members of the Foreign Relations or Armed Services Committees but who were interested in learning about the detailed intricacies of SALT II. This group received frequent, in-depth briefings from, among others, the chief SALT negotiator, the National Security Advisor, and the Director of Central Intelligence. In time, several of its members became the administration's pointmen in the Senate, arguing the details of the treaty with anti-SALT senators and hostile representatives of the media and special interest groups. Finally, in concert with its lobbying activities on Capitol Hill, the Carter Administration convened conferences in various parts of the United States on SALT and U.S.-Soviet relations. These public affairs conferences, in which key opinion leaders in a selected number of states were exposed to the pros and cons of SALT II, were one of the administration's few effective efforts at public education.

To be sure, the Reagan Administration--with its high credibility on national security issues and Republican control of the Senate--will be in an excellent position politically to pursue ratification if either the intermediate-range force negotiations or the strategic arms reduction talks come to fruition. Nevertheless, particularly in light of the recent SALT II experience and continuing, aggressive Soviet behavior, President Reagan is likely to face criticism from the right and the left regarding virtually any new strategic arms control agreement. Even if all of the recommendations and criticisms of the past administration herein noted were taken seriously, it is unclear whether the Reagan Administration could persuade the Senate to ratify a new agreement. It is certain, though, that without effective political management, any administration will have a very difficult task in the future in persuading the Congress to approve a new strategic arms control treaty.

NOTES

1. Charles Kupperman, *The SALT II Debate* (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Southern California, 1981).
2. See, for example, "Brzezinski Calls Democrats Soft Toward Moscow," *The New York Times* (November 30, 1980).
3. See CBS/New York Times poll on SALT (Mimeo released November 7, 1979). For detailed discussion, see also William Kincade, *U.S. Civil Defense Decision-Making: The Ford and Carter Administrations* (Ph.D. dissertation, American University, 1980).
4. Committee on the Present Danger, "Public Attitudes on Salt II: The Results of a Nationwide Scientific Poll of American Opinion" (March 15, 1979).
5. ABC News/Harris Survey, November 25, 1980, vol. II, no. 148. ABC News/Harris Survey, June 16, 1977, vol. I, no. 74; May 22, 1978, vol. I, no. 64; and May 14, 1979, vol. I, no. 58.
6. William Lanouette, "The Public and Arms Control," *Arms Control Today* (June 1980):1.
7. These findings are similar to those found in Roper Organization polls taken during 1979 regarding SALT. "SALT Support Shakey," *Public Opinion* (October/November 1979):40.
8. ABC News/Harris Survey, November 25, 1980, vol. II, no. 148.
9. ABC News/Harris Survey, February 28, 1980, vol. I, no. 59.
10. CBS News/New York Times Poll, January 1981 (Mimeo released February 2, 1981).
11. Gallup Poll (Mimeo released May 7, 1981).
12. For an empirical analysis of the effect of American involvement in Indochina on U.S. defense spending and policy during the 1970s, see Louis Kriesberg and Ross Klein, "Changes in Public Support for U.S. Military Spending," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* (March 1980). See also Daniel Yankelovich and Larry Kaagan, "Assertive America," *America and the World, 1980* (New York: Council of Foreign Relations, 1981), pp. 696-713.
13. "The Coming Battle Over SALT: How to Defeat the Treaty," *Public Opinion* (November/December 1978):7-F.

14. For example, see "Address by Secretary of State Cyrus Vance to the American Society of Newspaper Editors," *The New York Times* (April 11, 1978).
15. David Moore, "SALT and Beyond: The Public is Uncertain," *Foreign Policy* (Summer 1979).
16. "Carter's Nuclear Confidence Gap," *The New Republic* (April 15, 1978):16.
17. George Urban, "A Long Conversation with Dr. Zbigniew Brzezinski," *Encounter* (May 1981):14.
18. David Aaron, Deputy Assistant to the President for national security affairs, chaired the mini-SCC. The other regular participants were Walter Slocombe, Director of the Defense Department's SALT Working Group; Leslie Gelb, Director of the State Department's Bureau of Politico-Military Affairs; Spurgeon Keeny, Deputy Director of ACDA; General William Smith of the Joint Chiefs of Staff; and Robert Bowie, Deputy Director of the CIA. These men were deputies to the most important interagency group on national security matters, the Special Coordinating Committee (SCC). For a detailed discussion of the operations and personalities of the members of the mini-SCC, see Strobe Talbott, *Endgame* (New York: Harper and Row, 1979), pp. 94-98.
19. Baker was not consulted at all during the period from just prior to Secretary of State Vance's March 1977 trip to Moscow until October 1977. Yet, in the interim, the administration significantly changed its approach to the negotiations, adopting the so-called three-tiered approach (Treaty, Protocol, Joint Statement of Principles). When Baker first learned of the changes in the U.S. negotiating posture at a closed-door October hearing on SALT, he was furious and threatened to oppose any future SALT agreement unless he was consulted on a regular basis, something the administration thereafter earnestly sought to do.
20. Thomas Franck and Edward Weisband, *Foreign Policy by Congress* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), p. 259.
21. For a detailed discussion of this point, see Senate Foreign Relations Committee, "Additional Views of Mr. Glenn," *The SALT II Treaty, A Report of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, November 1979), pp. 484-486.
22. "Brzezinski Says his Critics Are Irked by his Candor," *The New York Times* (January 18, 1981).
23. "U.S.-Soviet Relations: From Bad to Worse," *America and the World, 1979* (New York: Pergamon Press, 1980), p. 529.

24. Milton Viorst, "The Coming Battle Over SALT," *Public Opinion* (November/December 1978):5-F.
25. For example, see "Brzezinski Sees Ethiopia Issue Slowing Arms Talks," *The New York Times* (March 2, 1978).
26. J. Brian Atwood, "The SALT II Treaty: A Victim of Self-Inflicted Linkage" (Address to the Harvard Club of Boston, December 17, 1980), p. 11.
27. For example, the administration responded constructively to Sam Nunn on permitting sharing of cruise missile technology with our European allies; Charles Mathias on establishing a "data base" for the strategic weapons of both sides; Dennis DeConcini on precisely defining the terms under which cruise missile technology would be limited; Dale Bumpers, John Culver, and Thomas McIntyre on establishing a suitable timetable for Soviet dismantlement of certain systems. For further details, see Franck and Weisband, pp. 290-291; and Talbott, pp. 96-7, 197-8.